History Education in Northern Ireland

Teaching the Northern Ireland Conflict in Northern Irish Schools

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the current situation of history education in Northern Ireland. First, it attempts to investigate how the Northern Ireland conflict in taught in Northern Irish schools; and second, if there is difference in how history is taught in schools which are predominately Catholic when compared to schools which are predominately Protestant. The main focus of the thesis is on the processes that occur in the classroom and the situation of history teachers. Some focus will also need to be put on the political and administrative aspect of education to understand how outside forces influences schools and history education. The thesis argues that history teachers aim to teach history in a way that develop their student's abilities to critically look at source material and expand their understanding of historical processes. In addition, it is argued that teachers are very aware of their potentially influential position, and that they to that affect attempt to deliver the content of the history subject in a neutral and unbiased manner.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Atle L. Wold, whose constructive commentary and belief in the project was indispensable. Thank you also for suggesting the use of interviews, a method which proved to be vital in creating a greater understanding of the topic. A very special thanks to the interviewees, Áine Byrne, Chris McIvor and Conrad Thomas, who generously gave of their time and provided valuable insight into history education in Northern Ireland. Many thanks to Thulasi Mylvaganam, who spent time proofreading the thesis and contributed with essential commentary on several of the chapters.

Silje Mjelde Håvardstun

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Content

Chapter One - Introduction

> 'The glorified story of the oppression or triumph of one's own community may have a more powerful appeal to young adolescents than the academic study of distant times and places—unless such study also has a compelling rationale.' [1]
>
> (Keith Barton)

History education in Northern Ireland has long been under scrutiny by educational authorities. As a school subject it is seen as potentially being able to make changes to the current standstill in the province. Even though 14 years have passed since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the start of decommissioning, tension between the two communities is still high, although not by far as high as previously. Children in Northern Ireland are still, for the most part, educated separately from members of 'the other' community. The segregated school system leaves teachers with the demanding task of giving their pupils a varied and balanced view upon recent local history. This task is not always welcomed by teachers, who often find contentious topics difficult to teach. Teachers often fear the students' reaction to the content and how it is taught, but also have to take into account the potential reactions from parents and society as a whole.

This thesis aims, first, to investigate **how the Northern Ireland conflict is taught in Northern Irish Schools**, and second, **if there is a difference in how history is taught in schools which are predominately Catholic when compared to schools which are predominately Protestant**. A main focus will be on what occurs in the classroom when history is taught, based on the author's own research and the research of other scholars. This introductory chapter will start by outlining why this topic is of relevance to investigate, as well as some central questions that are central for this thesis, before discussing the purpose of the research. In addition, the chapter will give an account for the methods and sources used to conduct this research. Towards the end of this chapter, the structure of the thesis is briefly outlined.

Why is the topic relevant?

Since the Good Friday Agreement was signed, the province of Northern Ireland has seen a greater stability in the management of the government. The signing of the Agreement also

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[1] Keith C. Barton, *"Best Not to Forget Them": Secondary Students' Judgments of Historical Significance in Northern Ireland,* Theory & Research in Social Education, 33:1 (2005), 32

created a political climate of change, which, among other things, initiated a revision of the history curriculum. It is of great interest to see how the educational sector, and what is more important, how the history subject have been affected by this. The schools and the history subject hold tremendous potential in bridging the gap between the two community since the subject could potentially help developing understanding and respect for people who come from a different background, and it is therefore of interest to see how, or even if, this opportunity is being utilised. In addition, the history subject in Northern Ireland is being pulled in two slightly different directions. One by those who believe the subject should focus on teaching history and that the academic side of the subject should be emphasised. This group mainly consists of teachers. The other direction is by those who believe that the potential moral and civic contribution of the subject should outweigh other concerns. Mostly, this group is made up by different civic groups who attempt to achieve influence in the school sector, but the authorities have also voiced similar opinions, as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis.

Central Questions

This thesis aims to investigate the connection between the history subject and the reconciliation process in the aftermath of the peace process. Central questions to be answered are: *are the teachers aware of the potential social relevance of the history subject? Are history teachers hesitant to teach the Northern Ireland conflict? Does parents' opinions and community background influence the child's history education?* Moreover, the thesis will explore *whether the politics of the local area have an influence on education and in particular the history subject.*

In recent years the history curriculum has been through some changes, including the newly revised curriculum of 2007. Following this last revision, the history curriculum is now more focused on using source material and the teachers can now more freely choose which topics to put focus on. By exploring this process, this study aims to answer the following questions: *What did this revision intend to change about the history curriculum? Has the revised curriculum accomplished some of what it aimed to do? How were these changes received by the teachers?* Additionally, the thesis will also examine *why was this change to the curriculum perceived as important?*

Along with focusing on the political aspect of the curriculum, this thesis will also explore the actual situation that the students encounter when they study history in school. In

this regard, this thesis aims to answer the following questions: *how much of the history of the province is learned outside the school? How is the student's sense of identity connected to the history education? How do the conflicting narratives of the province' history affect the history teaching?* With these questions in mind, it will be argued that formal history education is perceived by the students as being the most reliable source of historical information, but that forces outside of the schools also must be taken into account by the teachers and the schools.

Purpose of the Research

This research is centred on the history subject. Surely, other subjects have a potential in influencing how the students perceive their own situation and contemporary society, but the history subject could be seen as more significant in this regard because it deals with the province' history more directly than other subjects. History is not a statutory subject in Northern Irish schools until secondary school. For this reason, this study is limited to the years of formal history education, which occur during the three years of Key Stage 3. The main emphasis of this study will be on the situation as it is experienced by teachers. Less focus will be put on the political backdrop of the history subject, although some focus needs to be put on this to gain a fuller picture of the situation. All teachers interviewed for this thesis taught at grammar schools. This means that the students who attend these schools have to achieve results at a certain level to be able to attend. In addition, the parents need to pay a fee to send their children to these schools. Because of this, the academic level at the schools can be expected to be higher than in the secondary schools which are open to everyone. Due to the high academic level of the students, it is possible to conclude that this gives teachers more time to teach the content of the subject because the students are at a level where they are capable of coping with a difficult content. Less time then needs to be spent on making sure that all students are able to keep up with the progress. For these reasons, this study chose to focus on history teaching in grammar schools.

The choice to analyse the history subject's potential to make a positive contribution to the reconciliation process, was influenced by a number of factors. First, the writer has a great interest in education and it was therefore of interest to explore the educational field. Education in Northern Ireland is structured somewhat differently than from the rest of the UK, and this has become particularly true since the devolved government was put in place in 2007. Because the schools in Northern Ireland are facing different challenges than the rest of the UK, this made the educational field of the province an interesting topic to explore.

Second, the writer has, as a trained history teacher, a particular interest in the history subject, and therefore found it interesting to research what role the history subject holds in Northern Ireland, especially regarding the province' own history. With Northern Ireland's recent history, the subject has noteworthy relevance. The writer is also curious about potential differences within the educational sector and how history is really taught, and particularly those connected to the sectarian division in the school system. Third, it is of interest to explore how society in Northern Ireland sees the potential benefits of using the educational sector as part of the process in making a change in the current community divisions in the province. In this regard, there is also a political aspect of attempting to utilise the potentials of the history subject in a way that promotes reconciliation. The school system has an opportunity to influence young people's lives and it is fascinating to see how this opportunity is received and utilised.

Methods and Sources

Methods used in conducting this study have been qualitative. The study has been based on the combination of interviews and close reading of written primary and secondary sources. A total of three people from two different schools were interviewed for this thesis: Chris McIvor from Campbell College Belfast, Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas from St. Dominic's High School.[2] Chris McIvor is the Head of History at Campbell College. The school is an all-boys school, located in Belmont in Belfast. The location of the school is in an area dominated by Protestants and many of the students have connections to the Protestant community. Campbell College also have a junior college, which gives boys the opportunity to attend this school from year 1 through sixth form.[3] Áine Byrne is the Head of History at St. Dominic's, whereas Conrad Thomas is the Head of Politics. St. Dominic's is an all-girls schools, located in the Falls Road in Belfast. The school is Catholic and in a predominately Catholic neighbourhood, with the humanities as their special field of interest. This means that the school puts focus on this field and in turn, many of the students choose to continue with the subject after Key Stage 3.[4] The fact that one school is an all-boys school while the other is an all-girls school, does

[2] All the interviewees were selected on the background of what subject they taught. Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas was interviewed together at St. Dominic's High School in Belfast on 7 March 2012. Chris McIvor was interviewed via telephone on 27 February 2012 (with the interviewer in Bergen and the Interviewee in Belfast, as it did not prove practically possible to arrange an interview in person). The interview with Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas was recorded and transcribed. The interview with Chris McIvor was not recorded, but the interviewer took thorough notes which was later reviewed by the interviewee. It should be noted that the opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the individual and not the school.
[3] Interview with Chris McIvor (Bergen/Belfast 27 February 2012)
[4] Interview with Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas (Belfast, 7 March, 2012)

create some differences in teaching methods. Especially at a school with all boys, it becomes more important to include classroom activities which include for instance more movement. In an all-girls school other activities might be more necessary. These are differences that need to be accounted for, but they are unlikely to be influential to the outcome. All schools follow the same curriculum and this is likely to have a greater impact than the combination of their students.

There are both advantages and challenges with the use of interviews. Interviews with history teachers could give new perspectives and insight into the situation and provide information that might not be available elsewhere.[5] In addition, the interviews can provide new information and correct possible misunderstandings.[6] For example, the writer hypothesised beforehand that many teachers would be hesitant and feel uncomfortable about teaching the Northern Ireland conflict to their students. However, during the interviews this view became somewhat altered. An understanding was gained that not all teachers felt this hesitation about the topic and that some even liked to teach it because it so easily engaged and involved the students, who were eager to learn about the topic. Still, some of the hypothesis was confirmed in that the interviewees reported that they knew that some teachers preferred not to teach such a contentious issue, but this was not the majority of the teachers. Thus, interviews could help providing a new perspective on the problem and consequently contribute to the creation of a new hypothesis. This is especially relevant to the school sector, where the teachers hold much insight into the situation in the educational system, which could be difficult to obtain elsewhere. As a case study it is an indication of how things are, which is valid, even if it does not provide a complete picture.

Nevertheless, there are important challenges which are crucial to remember. The informant might give answers that he or she thinks the interviewer wants.[7] There is also the risk of the interviewer unconsciously influencing the responses of the informants by asking leading questions. In this regard, the wording of the questions become important, and it is ideal if the interviewer appears to know little about the topic beforehand and allows the interviewee to provide new commentary about the topic.[8] Moreover, it is possible that the teachers' feels restricted in what they can say, simply because they do not want to say anything negative about their employer or their place of work. Information could also be

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[5] Knut Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke hva den engang var: En innføring i historiefaget* [trans. *The Past is Not What It Used to Be: An Introduction to the Discipline of History*] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999), 195
[6] Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke hva den engang var,* 193-4
[7] Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke hva den engang var,* 196
[8] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design an Methods* (Los Angeles: Sage Inc., 2009), 107

biased, especially if the interviewee belongs to the same community as his or her school and pupils. Consequently, the reliability of the interviews and the information that they provide, must be cross-checked by other sources, either oral or written. Furthermore, the information has to be seen in a wider context gained from primary and secondary sources.[9] In addition, memory is fluent, and the interviewees might not remember the past accurately and therefore give incorrect answers on how the situation was and how it differs from the current.[10] Despite these challenges, the advantages of using interviews are unquestionable. They give the topic a valuable addition the written sources and may give a new perspective on the topic. Thus, the negative aspects of using interviews are exceeded by the positive.

This study has made use of both written primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used have been, in addition to the interviews, official documents, and most notably the Shared Future report and the Northern Irish history curriculum for Key Stage 3. These documents have provided useful insight into the administrative and political aspect of history teaching. Especially the history curriculum was useful to gain a greater understanding of what the curriculum designers saw as important to focus on in the curriculum. Moreover, the thesis has used a number of newspaper articles, both as a source of information about the situation of the history subject in Northern Irish schools, but also to understand how it has been portrayed by the media. In this regard, the articles have functioned both as primary and secondary sources.

Furthermore, a number of secondary sources have been used to write this thesis, predominately books and articles in books and journals. These sources helped to provide an essential insight into what has previously been done in this field of study and provided much needed information. Consequently, these sources have helped to understand different interpretations within the area of study as well as provide a greater insight into the academic, critical perspective on history education in Northern Ireland in general. By contrasting these sources to the results from the interviews, it was possible to gain a greater understanding of the situation of the history subject. Still, since the area of study is Northern Ireland, a certain amount of cautiousness when dealing with the sources is necessary. Much of what is written about the Northern Ireland conflict is political and has an agenda in trying to sway the reader in a certain direction. This is a factor that must be taken into account when dealing with source material from the region. Although most of what is written about the educational sector

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[9] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 210-211
[10] Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke hva den engang var,* 193

attempts to be neutral, this might not always be fully achieved. In conclusion, both the oral and the written primary and secondary sources have in combination proved to be tremendously important for the work and indispensably in gaining an understanding of the field of study.

Structure

The thesis consists of four chapters in all: this first introductory chapter; chapter two, on the political backdrop and the administrative aspect of education; chapter three, on the situation in the classroom; and chapter four, which will summarise and conclude the findings of the study and discuss in short, the implications these findings have for the future of the history subject. Chapter two will provide the political background of the history subject in recent years, including curriculum changes. It will begin by outlining recent political documents published about the educational system and the history subject in particular. Then the chapter will look briefly into how the schools system in Northern Ireland is organised. The schools in Northern Ireland are segregated, not only by denomination but also very often by gender. Along with being dominated by one denomination, the schools who participated in this research were also separated by gender. The effects of having a segregated school system will not be dealt with in this thesis. However, it is relevant to the topic, since having a segregated school system could potentially lead to the children learning a slightly different content. The chapter will also explore the recent changes which have been made to the history curriculum and how this has affected the history subject. Here it will also be dealt with how the new curriculum was perceived by the teachers. In this section, the differences between the previous and the current curriculum will be discussed. Chapter three will deal with the actual learning situation that the students encounter in schools. It will discuss how and when the students form their own historical identities and what implications this has for the teaching of history. Furthermore, the chapter will discuss the differing versions of the province' history and how this affects the students and their perception of history. When what the students already know about history differs from the history they learn in the classroom, this creates several challenges for the history teacher which will be discussed in this section. This chapter will also explore where the students really learn history and which factors are most influential in their history education. The idea that students are so prejudiced and influenced by sectarian stories that history education is helpless in changing these perceptions is widespread. However, as will be discussed in this chapter, this perception might not be true. In the concluding chapter, chapter

four, the main findings of the study will be summarised and towards the end of the chapter some potential implications for the future of the history subject will be explored.

Chapter Two - Traditions in History Education

The political and administrative aspect of history education in Northern Ireland

> The hand of history is at last lifting the burden of terror and violence and shaping the future of the people of Northern Ireland
>
> (Tony Blair)[1]

History education in the whole of the UK has gone through major changes over the last three decades. This has been especially noticeable in Northern Ireland, where history and its effects are very much present in everyday life. After the Good Friday Agreement the political climate focused on utilising the many possibilities that the schools provided in promoting reconciliation after years of conflict. Most notably, the Northern Irish history curriculum was put through a series of revisions. The history subject has long been seen as a potential means of establishing and prolonging peace and there have long been high hopes and ambitions for the history curriculum and the subject itself, at least from a political stance. As will be discussed later, teachers of history do not always feel comfortable with the role they and their subject has been given as someone or something that is supposed to bring a moral and civic contribution to their students.

This chapter will explore the political and administrative side of the thesis. Several changes have been made to the educational policy and the curriculum itself over recent decades, which has consequences for the history subject and its role in Northern Irish society. The beginning of the chapter will discuss the political situation in Northern Ireland in relation to the educational sector. Recent years have seen a series of changes in education and the chapter outlines the political backdrop for these changes. One of these developments were the publication of the policy document called *A Shared Future,* which argues for a more shared and integrated Northern Ireland with a significant focus on the potential role that education could play in this. Then the chapter moves on to outline the current situation of the school system in Northern Ireland, and in particular the tendencies to educate children separate from members of 'the other' community. Finally, the chapter will discuss the changes that have been made to the history curriculum and the implications of this for further teaching of the subject. This section will also deal with changes within history teaching itself. Traditionally,

[1] John Mullin, *Hand of history touches Ulster*. The Guardian Newspaper, December 3 1999, http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/1999/dec/03/past.northernireland?INTCMP=SRCH (Acessed 01.03.12)

history teaching was based around storytelling, whereas nowadays more focus is put on interpreting source material.

Political situation

The changes that occurred in the educational sector in the late 1980s in Northern Ireland can be seen in the light of general wave of change that occurred in the United Kingdom at the time. This was during the Thatcher government in Westminster, and there was a political desire to move the education in a more conservative direction. British education became more strictly defined by curriculum requirements than it had previously been. The first important change that came about was the introduction of a common curriculum for the whole of the UK. Previously there had been no common curriculum, but legislation that came about in 1989 introduced a required, common curriculum.[2] This was also the case in Northern Ireland, where a National Curriculum was created and applied to both controlled and maintained schools.[3] Throughout the recent Troubles in Northern Ireland, there was a general consensus among politicians in Northern Ireland and others that much of the problem could be solved by changing the school system. With a common curriculum, politicians intended to use education and the school system to further peace and prosperity. If the students were taught the same content, this would potentially create a greater sense of togetherness. Since 1989 the Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA) has been in charge of creating and enforcing curriculum requirements.[4] The introduction of the common curriculum did not meet much opposition, neither from politicians nor the general public, but it proved to be difficult to enforce the teaching of controversial issues. Teachers seemed to fear addressing these topics in the classroom and were nervous about making critical judgements towards the other side.[5] Certain schools refused to address the more contentious issues of the province and this was best seen in the most segregated areas where sectarian problems were an issues. Teachers in these schools were found most likely to 'play it safe' with the history curriculum and not address the most controversial topics of recent local history.[6] However, the teachers

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[2] Margaret E. Smith, *Reckogning with the Past: Teaching History in Northern Ireland* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2005), 89.
[3] Smith, *Reckogning with the Past*, 100
[4] Smith, *Reckogning with the Past*, 90
[5] Smith, *Reckogning with the Past*, 143
[6] Mark Crow, *NI teachers 'avoid talk on the Troubles.'* The Guardian Newspaper, September 11 2004, http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2004/sep/11/schools.northernireland?INTCMP=SRCH (Acessed 11.02.12)

interviewed for this thesis did not seem to share the fear of teaching contentious topics, but showed understanding for those colleagues who did not feel comfortable in doing so.[7]

When violence broke out in the 1960s, many people as well as politicians looked to the school system in Northern Ireland to be a positive influence towards peace and reconciliation. During the first half of the Troubles, it was a generally accepted assumption that the school system could have favourable contribution in encouraging reconciliation and tolerance. The history subject was seen as a one of the core elements in succeeding with this. Similarly, the start of the peace process in the early 1990s led to new opportunities for enhancing the positive possibilities in education. Still, even though there have been evidence of a more shared practise in the school sector, the separatist pressure is still strong, mostly due to the peace process' focus on the right to be different. This tension between shared practice and separatist pressure can be seen clearly in the Good Friday Agreement, which focuses both on recognising the right of separate identities and their expressions, and on commitment to the process of social integration.[8] Both of these elements are seen as vital in sustaining the fragile peace which the agreement established. However, the Good Friday Agreement seems to put more focus on the right to be different and it could be argued that this commitment to cultural pluralism places more attention on accepting difference than on creating a common ground.[9] Since the Good Friday Agreement and despite efforts to enhance the centre ground, political polarisation has increased, with the extreme political parties, Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party, gaining more political influence in their respective communities.[10] This could indicate that putting much focus on the right to be different has in fact contributed to maintain the divisions in society and might even have made it more difficult to create a common ground. The importance of accepting the differences cannot be overlooked. However, sustaining peace in Northern Ireland would be difficult if people's identification with either of the communities should be downplayed. People in Northern Ireland tend to have strong affiliations to one of the communities and it is not realistic to ignore this. Still, the right to choose one's own identification can sometimes come into conflict with creating a common ground on which to build.

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[7] Interview with Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas (Belfast, 7 March, 2012); and interview with Chris McIvor (Bergen/Belfast 27 February 2012)
[8] Tony Gallagher, *Balancing difference and the common good: lessons from a post-conflict society,* Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 35:4 (2005), 431
[9] Gallagher, *Balancing difference and the common good*, 440
[10] Bernadette C. Hayes & Ian McAllister, *Education as a mechanism for conflict resolution in Northern Ireland*, Oxford Review of Education, 35:4 (2009), 437

Important principles in the Good Friday Agreement are the principles of equality and the commitment to promote tolerance.[11] After the signing of the Agreement in 1998, the authorities in Northern Ireland have prioritised the promotion of greater equality. In January 2003 a consultation paper was issued by the government. This paper confirmed that problems of divisions were still a salient part of the Northern Irish society. A broad strategy for a more shared and pluralist society was outlined and the consultation paper generated numerous written responses. Five-hundred of these responses was analysed and resulted in the release of the *A Shared Future* policy document.[12] This document was released in 2005 by the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister and it argues that there is an overwhelming support for a more shared society in Northern Ireland.[13] After the consultation it became clear that three public policy areas stood out, one of these being education.[14] This continues the assumption that the educational sector holds the key to influence and change the current situation. The document outlines steps and actions which can be co-ordinated across government and throughout civic society with the aim of creating relationships that promote mutual recognition and trust.[15] Besides stressing the importance of the right to choose one's own identity, the document also makes the cost of keeping up a separate but equal policy:

> 'Separate but equal is not an option. Parallel living and the provision of parallel services are unsustainable both morally and economically Good relations must build on the significant progress that has been made on the equality agenda. No one is arguing for an artificially homogeneous Northern Ireland and no one will be asked to suppress or give up their chosen identity. However, the costs of a divided society - whilst recognising, of course, the very real fears of people around safety and security considerations - are abundantly clear…' [16]

Studies have been conducted to outline the financial cost of a divided society in Northern Ireland, and the results proved that segregation put an extra strain on the already limited resources. The *Shared Future* policy had an aim to establish a culture of tolerance and a society where there is impartiality and respect for diversity. A wish was also put forth to 'encourage understanding of the complexity of our history, through museums and common school curriculum.'[17] Despite the wish from politicians that museums should encourage a

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[11] Good Friday Agreement, The: An Agreement reached at the multi-party talks on Northern Ireland (1998), Cm 3883, The Stationary Office, London.
[12] Darby and Knox, refered to in Joan Hughes, *Peace, reconciliation and a shared future: a policy shift or more of the same?,* Community Development Journal, 44:1, (2007), 24-5
[13] Colin Knox, *Cohesion, sharing, and integration in Northern Ireland,* Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy, volume 29 (2011), 549
[14] Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, *A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland*, (2005), 11
[15] OFMdFM, *A Shared Future*, 5
[16] OFMdFM, *A Shared Future*, 15
[17] OFMdFM, *A Shared Future*, 10

deeper understanding, however, most museums and historical sites in Northern Ireland avoid dealing with political history in fear of offending their public.[18] The document also pressure the teachers to influence their students in a certain way by stating that 'teachers influence greatly the lives of our children and young people and have a key role to play in helping to develop an inclusive society built on trust and mutual respect.'[19] A teacher's influence on his or hers students is impossible to ignore. Still, most teachers aim to teach all their topics in a neutral manner and do not have a wish to influence their student's opinions. To put the teacher in such a position is not welcomed by many teachers, who trust their own judgement in how and what to teach. Political influence on this matter can only successfully function if the teachers agree with the guidelines set forth to them. In addition, reconciliation cannot and should not be left to the schools alone.[20] The school system alone cannot cope with the challenges of a divided society on its own. It needs to be a joint effort with other sectors. However, despite the direct rule administration's commitment to the policy and the high cost of a divided society, when the devolved government was put in place in 2007, this policy was abandoned by the devolved Executive.[21]

The Northern Irish School System

There is not at present a conscious policy to segregate the school system, yet the system remains segregated for the most part. The Northern Irish school system is clearly segregated, both by religion and by gender, though mainly by religion, with the Protestant children attending the 'controlled' schools and the Catholic children attending the 'maintained' schools. In theory, the 'controlled' schools are non-denominational, but in reality most their students are Protestant. This is partly because most Catholic children have been pushed towards their own system, and partly because Protestant (but not Catholic) clergy are included on their boards of management.[22] The Roman Catholic Church has long advocated for their right to educate their children within the Catholic community. This influences parents' choice in which school to send their children. The fact that the 'controlled' schools had members of the Protestant clergy on their school boards and none from the Catholic clergy gave further rise to the notion that Catholic interests would not be best looked after in these schools. This,

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[18] Keith C. Barton, *'Best Not to Forget Them': Secondary Students' Judgments of Historical Significance in Northern Ireland*, Theory & Research in Social Education, 33:1, (2005), 32
[19] OFMdFM, *A Shared Future*, 27
[20] Phillip O'Sullivan, Ian O'Flynn & David Russel, *Education and a Shared Future: Options for Sharing and Collaboration in Northern Ireland Schools* (Belfast: Community Relations Council, 2009), 9
[21] Knox, *Cohesion, sharing, and integration in Northern Ireland*, 550
[22] Murray, refered in John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 42

in turn, creates a certain amount of social pressure for parents to send their children to Catholic schools. Social pressure also affects the Protestant community, who might see their interests as best served by the 'controlled' schools. In addition to this, there is also the element of geography. Children tend to attend schools close to their homes for practical purposes. Considering that people in Northern Ireland, and particular in Belfast, often live separate from members of 'the other' community, this is also reflected in where the children attend school. So even if the system is not formally segregated, there are factors such as social pressure and geography involved which in effect makes it segregated.

Statistics released in 2002 by the Department of Education shows that segregation in the schools is still very much part of the picture. Of the Catholic students, 93% of them attended 'maintained' schools. Catholic students in the 'controlled' schools only amounted to 5%, whereas Catholics in the integrated schools only made up 3%. The situation is little different concerning the Protestant students. A total of 94% of the Protestant students attended the 'controlled' schools. Only 1% of the Protestant students attended 'maintained' schools, whereas 5% of them attended integrated schools.[23] Even though some students do attend the schools of 'the other' community or the integrated schools, the fact remains that the children on the whole attend school with children of their own denomination for various reasons. The most important reason for this is that children tend to attend school in their own neighbourhood. When many neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland are dominated by people belonging to the same denomination, this will also be reflected in the schools. This is particularly true for the Belfast area.

In spite of this, efforts have been made recent years in attempt to change the current situation. Since the late 1980s, the British government have attempted to increase cross-community contact in Northern Ireland and in 1987 the Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) was established. The CCRU's main objectives was to ensure that all received equal opportunities, promoting increased cross-community contact and encourage mutual understanding and respect for diversity. In addition, DENI established a cross-community contact scheme for segregated schools, as well as offering financing to planned integrated schools.[24] One of the most important aspects of these various attempts to influence the situation, is that 'cross-community contact can make it more difficult to 'dehumanise' the

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[23] Calculations are made on the basis of table 18.2 in Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, Fiona Stephen, *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 272
[24] Hughes, *Peace, reconciliation and a shared future*, 23

other community.'[25] By creating opportunities and encouraging the children to make friends across the community barriers there is hope of lessening the influence of prejudice. If the students have friends of both denomination they are less likely to stereotype members of 'the other' community. This is supported by research done in integrated schools, which conclude that 'children in such schools readily make friends across the community divide, while the children retain highly positive attitudes to religion.'[26] The close interaction with students from a different denomination then themselves results in the students gaining a more open-minded approach to religion. Religion is only a part of a person's identity students who attend integrated schools seem to have a better understanding of this. Contact between the two communities from an early age would most likely lessen the tensions between them. More integrated schools as well as promoting contact between the two communities seem to take precedence over history teaching in creating a positive change in the situation. Still, a combination of these provides many opportunities for making the history teaching more relevant when teaching recent history.

Curriculum Changes

History and particularly the recent past have great importance in Northern Ireland, and this makes the history subject an important one too. Consequently, it has long been commonly accepted that much of history is learned outside school and that this history might strengthen the current community divisions. Because of this, education authorities in Northern Ireland have tried to produce a curriculum that gives the students a more balanced understanding of the past. History is not a separate subject in primary school, so formal teaching of history does not begin until secondary education, during Key Stage 3. Local Irish history is generally not taught until the third year of Key Stage 3, although this is up to the schools themselves to decide. The idea here is that the students should develop their skills as critical historians by working with other topics before they tackle the more contentious issues.[27]

The curriculum has in recent years been through a major revision. The current Northern Irish curriculum was introduced in 2007 and eventually came to change the curriculum for all Key Stages.[28] The previous history curricula have been topic-based, with a

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[25] Wayne Nelles, *Comparative Education, Terrorism and Human Security - From Critical Pedagogy to Peacebuilding?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 129
[26] McWhirter refered in Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, 44
[27] Keith C. Barton, Margaret Conway, Alan W. McCully, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland*, International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research, 5:1 (2001), 1-2
[28] Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Belfast: Northern Ireland Curriculum Council (NICC), http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/about/ (Acessed 22.02.12)

certain amount of given topics and each year of Key Stage 3 had a designated topic, which was to be taught during the year. The first two years focused on the Norman invasion and English conquests and colonisation. The third year was devoted to the development of Irish nationalism and the period from the Act of Union to Partition. This was to be put in relation to British politics, the growth of European nationalism and World War One.[29] Now, however, the curriculum is more focused on teaching historical skills and abilities to the students, so that the students themselves can apply these to their studies. The revised curriculum focuses more on the students understanding historical processes and research than simply learning the content of what happened in the past, the idea being that the students should develop a chronological awareness of historical events in order to understand that actions and events have consequences. In addition, the students should understand that certain issues or circumstances are open to different interpretations and can be viewed from different perspectives. Furthermore, the revised curriculum aims to encourage the students to seek out and evaluate evidence, particularly for those issues which are contested.[30] Still, it will be left to the schools and the teachers themselves to decide how and what to teach, so it remains to be seen which, if any, of the potential benefits of the new curriculum will be realised.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum for history is organised into two separate documents, one being the 'statutory requirement' and the other one the 'non-statutory guidance.'[31] The first is the one schools need to comply with, whereas the second only gives guidance to teachers and schools in how to best achieve the goals set forth in the statutory curriculum. The investigations done in relation to this thesis has focused on both of these, since it is of interest what requirements there are and, moreover, what guidance is given to the schools by the authorities. Even though the curriculum does not say which topics should be covered, it gives clear indications of what abilities the students should gain from their history education as well as making the subject more enquiry-based by encouraging students to use sources critically. The curriculum operates with three objectives, with objective two focusing on developing the students as contributors to society. It states that the students should have the opportunity to 'investigate the long term and short term causes and consequences of the partition of Ireland

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[29] Keith C. Barton, Alan W. McCully, *Learning History and Inheriting the Past: the Interaction of School and Community Perspectives in Northern Ireland*, International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research, 5: 1 (2005), 1

[30] Gallagher, *Balancing difference and the common good: lessons from a post-conflict society,* 438

[31] Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), *Environment and Society,* the Department of Education, http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/key_stage_3/areas_of_learning/environment_and_society/ (Acessed 22.02.12)

and how it has influenced Northern Ireland today including key events and turning points.'[32] This has a clear connection to the teaching of the Northern Ireland conflict. Interestingly, this is one of the few statutory requirements in the curriculum where there is no suggestion of potential topics given. This is a sensitive issue, therefore it is possible that the authorities are hesitant to give examples in fear of putting more focus on some topics and less on others and consequently risking somebody feeling that important topics has been left out. On the other hand it is possible that this is seen as something best left for the teacher to decide. The curriculum guidance does not give any other indications for solving this issue, other than a general reference to citizenship.[33] In this regard, the citizenship education is relevant, since its aim is to develop the students as contributors to society and addresses topics such as equality, what is right and wrong in the world and making a difference.[34] When it comes to the relevance of history, the curriculum guidance makes it clear that:

> "Teachers have opportunities to look for themes or issues that are real and relevant to the lives of pupils today. The skills and the concepts that are addressed in History can be developed through exploring current issues in the media that pupils express an interest in."[35]

In a city like Belfast, which has experienced years of conflict, this objective becomes highly relevant. However, it does not give any indications of what topics might be included. Nor does it require the teacher to do so, it simply states that they have the opportunity to do so. This could indicate that the authorities are reluctant to direct the teachers to teach potentially sensitive topics.

The revised curriculum offers greater flexibility to teachers by going beyond the basic aims of the subject to encourage teachers to let the students make connections between the content and contemporary society.[36] Also, it offers ample opportunities for schools and teachers to choose what topics within history to teach. In addition, the curriculum does not put down any requirements for how much time should be spent on each of these topics. This level of freedom in deciding which topics to teach is favoured by many schools, and as noted by Chris McIvor 'this suits Campbell College very well.'[37] Still, this level of freedom and flexibility could cause challenges from some schools, who might find the task overwhelming.

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[32] Curriculum for Environment and Society: History, objective 2.
[33] Curriculum for Environment and Society: History, guidance, 12
[34] Curriculum, guidance, 12
[35] Curriculum, guidance, 19
[36] Alan McCully, What Role for History Teaching in the Transitional Justice Process in Deeply Divided Societies, in Irene Nakou & Isabel Barca (ed.), *Contemporary Public Debates over History Education, A Volume in International Review of History Education,* (United States of America: IAP- Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2010), 181
[37] Interview with Chris McIvor, (Bergen/Belfast 27 February 2012)

Moreover, many teachers seem to be hesitant to make their history teaching too relevant to current and contemporary issues. As research done by Barton, McCully and Conway stated:

> "It should be noted, however, that teachers usually do not address historical aspects of contemporary or controversial issues directly during required coursework, nor is this an explicit part of the syllabus for those years. Indeed, many teachers disavow the attempt to make history directly relevant to contemporary concerns, either because of perceived community pressure or because of their own belief that academic subjects should be removed from current societal concerns."[38]

This could indicate that teachers feel pressured from their communities to not teach any topics that might provoke. In an area where peace is considered fragile, provoking parents and their respective communities might be seen by teachers as the least desirable outcome. In addition, teachers are focused on treating the topic with respect, especially since it hits close to home.[39] It may then seem that many teachers play it safe when it comes to teaching their students about the conflict and this could be explicitly relevant in areas where there is paramilitary activity that might produce repercussions if provoked. In addition, research done by Alison Kitson found that teachers had a tendency for simply making the children aware of differences without addressing the reasons for these differences.[40] She also found that the more segregated the neighbourhood was, the more bland the history teaching was. This could be seen as an indication that teachers are hesitant to bring up controversial topics in the classroom in fear of emotional responses from their students. Still, even if some teachers experience pressure to teach history in a certain way and therefore avoid controversial issues, this is unlikely to apply to all teachers. The teachers interviewed for this thesis all related that they did not feel a need to avoid sensitive topics, although they recognised that some of their colleagues might not have the same opinion. Also, as noted by Áine Byrne, the teachers at St. Dominic's would not let themselves be swayed by parents' opinions and the politics of the local area in what and how to teach.[41]

Additionally, the importance of teaching controversial issues in the safe environment of the classroom should not be overlooked. Here, the students can explore controversial issues more freely and impartially than they would have been if they were left to make such interpretations in their own time.[42] This view is also supported by the Departments of

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[38] Barton, Conway, McCully, refered to in Barton, McCully, *Learning History and Inhereting the Past: the Interaction of School and Community Perspectives in Northern Ireland*, 2
[39] Interview with Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas (Belfast, 7 March, 2012); and interview with Chris McIvor (Bergen/Belfast 27 February 2012)
[40] Crow, *NI teachers avoid talk on the Troubles*, 2004
[41] Interview with Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas (Belfast, 7 March, 2012
[42] Crow, *NI teachers avoid talk on the Troubles*, 2004

Education's, whose history working group, released a report in 1992 that indicated that history had a potentially important role to play in the field of values education, thus:

> 'By promoting discussion and according respect to the views and opinions of the individual pupil, the history teacher can promote a sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. By reflecting and evaluating evidence from the past and, in particular, evidence which addresses differing viewpoints, pupils can learn to form conclusions in a reasoned manner. By exploring controversial issues within their own classroom, by exchanging ideas and opinions with pupils in other schools or though joint work on an historical issue, pupils can become sensitive to the views of others.'[43]

The use of evidence is mentioned as useful in teaching controversial topics in a way that addresses differing viewpoints. By letting the students explore conflicting evidence within the classroom, they could potentially develop a greater acceptance of the views of others that might differ from their own. This indicates that there is an expectation that teachers should foster mutual understanding and tolerance and encourage their students to think critically about the content that are taught. History teaching could then function as a means of counteracting the influence the students are experiencing in their own communities. As Alan McCully related to The Guardian:

> "The past is very well taught in Northern Ireland. However, there is a division in history teaching between those who apply history directly to modern events, and those who do not. There is a need for a flexible history curriculum in which teachers have the freedom to place different emphasis on various subjects in order to challenge prevailing local interpretations"[44]

This revised curriculum surely does provide this flexibility for teachers to more freely be able to choose how to teach sensitive issues like the Troubles and how much emphasis is put on this. However, when the new curriculum gives more freedom in what topics to choose, it consequently also gives the choice to not teach some topics. This puts much responsibility on the teachers, whether welcomed or not. For teachers who prefer to avoid sensitive topics altogether the current curriculum gives ample opportunities for keeping up such a practise. Still, it must also be considered that teaching a 'new history' to students who have been accustomed to one version of history, might not be welcomed by the students themselves. Historical memory is deeply rooted in a society and introducing a different history includes challenging previous perceptions that have long duration.[45] However, as noted by Phillips et al.,'the history curriculum in Northern Ireland provides positive potential to contribute to the process of undermining sectarian hostilities—themselves the product of temporal factors—

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[43] Northern Ireland Department of Education (DENI), *Proposals for History in the Northern Ireland Curriculum* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Curriculum Council (NICC), 1990), 83-84
[44] Alan McCully refered to in Crow, *NI teachers avoid talk on the Troubles*, 2004
[45] Smith, *Reckogning with the past*, 14

through the promotion of mutual understanding.'[46] The revised curriculum offers many opportunities for teaching history in a manner that promotes future reconciliation. Also, greater freedom allows the schools and the teachers to choose the solutions most appropriate to their students.

Since the introduction of a national curriculum in Northern Ireland, the history curriculum has aimed to give a balanced and neutral account of the region's history. The curriculum has previously and still is meant to expose the students to a more standardised and in-depth approach to the teaching of the conflict. Besides providing content knowledge, history teaching in Northern Ireland aims, in accordance with history teaching in the rest of the United Kingdom, to approach the subject from an inquisitorial viewpoint and look at events and issues from the perspectives of those who lived at the time, being able to recognise differing interpretations and form their conclusions on examination of primary and secondary sources.[47] The usage of source material outside the textbook then becomes an important part of the teaching and helps the students understand that history is more than what the textbook presents. Furthermore, there is an unspoken acceptance that by the end of the final year of compulsory history education should contribute to give the students a greater understanding of the diversity in cultural and political background amongst young people in Northern Ireland. Moreover, a deeper understanding of history and historical processes should provide an alternative to the partisan and sectarian histories the students are confronted with outside of the classroom.[48] However, as Barton and McCully argues:

> 'teachers usually do not address historical aspects of contemporary or controversial issues directly during required coursework … indeed, many teachers disavow the attempt to make history directly relevant to contemporary concerns, either because of perceived community pressure or because of their own belief that academic subjects should be removed from current societal concerns.'[49]

The teachers interviewed in connection with this thesis fall in under the latter category, meaning that they saw the subject primarily from an academic point of view. History is perceived as important in its own right and any potential moral contribution the subject might have will come as a consequence of the skills and abilities acquired throughout the history teaching. There was a general acceptance among them that history teaching should develop

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[46] Robert Phillips, Paul Goalen, Alan McCully & Sydney Wood, *Four Histories, One Nation? History teaching, nationhood and a British identity*, Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 29:2 (1999), 164
[47] Barton & McCully, *Learning History and Inheriting the Past*, 2
[48] Barton & McCully, *Learning History and Inheriting the Past*, 2
[49] Barton & McCully, *Learning History and Inheriting the Past*, 2

the students' critical and historical way of thinking, rather than influence their interpretation of historical events.[50]

The history curriculum in Northern Ireland is often praised as a good model of how to deal with history teaching in post-conflict societies. The curriculum makes sure that all students are taught the same overall content, which includes both Irish history as well as British and European history. In addition, the teaching is enquiry-based, which allows the students to explore a given topic from a number of different perspectives.[51] History education in Northern Ireland can then be seen as having come a long way towards potentially playing a role in reconciliation in the region. Still, a central question in history teaching is whether the teacher should simply develop the students' understanding of the past or try to confront the present considering the past.[52] This difficult question is very closely connected to the problem this thesis aims to shed light on. In an area that has experienced conflict, it is next to impossible to overlook the potential history education has to influence the situation. In addition, the aspect of the creation of historical identities must be considered. The students' historical identifications are influenced by the community conflict and this has implications for history teaching and the objective of the curriculum. The current curriculum supports those who argue for a history curriculum that directly addresses potentially contentious topics and draws a link from these to the contemporary situation. Although official documents support such an approach to the subject, the reality is that for the most part the students are left to make this link on their own without the teacher's guidance. Barton and McCully argue that the students do make such connections on their own 'and without teacher mediation those connections are likely to be highly selective and uncritical.'[53] A teachers role as a mediator then becomes important and it is crucial that the teachers maintain his' or hers' neutrality and uses this to challenge the students own ideas in order to broaden their own perspectives. The teacher needs to teach the content as well as trying to make the students connect the knowledge with the contemporary situation.

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[50]Interview with Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas (Belfast, 7 March, 2012); and interview with Chris McIvor (Bergen/Belfast 27 February 2012)

[51] Alison Kitson, History Teaching and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland, in Elisabeth A. Cole (ed.) *Teaching the Violoent Past: History Education and Reconciliation* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 123

[52] Alan McCully refered in, Keith C. Barton & Alan W. McCully, *History, Identity, and the School Curriculum in Northern Ireland: An Empirical Study of Secondary Students' Ideas and Perspectives*, Journal of Curriculum Studies, 37:1 (2005), 88

[53] Barton & McCully, *History, Identity, and the School Curriculum in Northern Ireland*, 108

It remains to be seen whether the formal school curriculum will make a contribution in challenging the sectarian views that still remains prominent in some parts of the province.[54] As the curriculum now operates, it leaves many of these issues up to the schools and the individual teachers to decide. The fact that the history curriculum does not address the students' formulations of their own identities in historical terms could be a deciding factor in whether the subject actually will have a lasting effect of the students perception of the issues that are still disputed in the province. However, history teaching is not primarily meant to provide an alternative to the students' formulating their own identities. Nor does the curriculum give prominence to making connections between contemporary issues and historical events but, as noted by Barton and McCully, 'individual teachers are free to explore such connections in their classes, and many do, but this approach remains very much a voluntary effort and one which a large portion of teachers would consider either risky or unnecessary.'[55] Their research, conducted in Northern Irish schools, found that the curriculum largely prepares the students for the sort of thinking envisioned by the curriculum creators. It allows for the students to explore the subject and form their own opinions based on the source material presented to them by the teacher during the years of formal history education. Barton and McCully's research also found that sectarian stories did not dominate the students' ideas about history as much as one might have expected.[56] Even though there are high hopes for the potential influence of the history subject, especially from the educational authorities:

> 'The purpose of the curriculum, rather, is to provide young people with a foundation of historical skills and knowledge, from which they may draw, on their own initiative, in analysing or constructing a sense of identity. But failing to address issues of identity more directly, history education in Northern Ireland may ultimately doom itself to irrelevance.'[57]

It is important that the history subject provides the students with the skills needed to make conscious choices about their own historical identification. However, more focus needs to be put on how these identities are formed and which issues they create. History as a school subject holds an important position in changing students' perception of their own situation, regardless whether this aspect is focused on during the teaching or not. This position cannot and should not be overlooked.

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[54] Keith C. Barton & Alan W. McCully, History Teaching and the Perpetuation of Memories: the Northern Ireland Experience, in Ed Cairns & Michael D. Roe (ed.), *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 108
[55] Cairns & Roe (ed.), *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*, 113
[56] Cairns & Roe (ed.), *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*, 116
[57] Cairns & Roe (ed.), *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*,, 122

Summary

History teaching in Northern Irish schools is a subject that is experiencing certain pressure from above. The educational authorities have high hopes for the subject and there are expectations that history should have an influential role in changing current community divisions in the region. Research done in conflict areas supports the importance of teaching history in a way that promotes future reconciliation. This is recognised by the authorities in Northern Ireland, who strives to create a curriculum that aims to teach the subject and the content in a neutral and unprejudiced manner. Even though these expectations are created out of the best of intentions, they are sometimes a bit unrealistic compared to the actual situation that faces history teachers. These overall aims of the history subject are often in conflict with making the subject interesting and engaging for the students, because it often leads to teachers avoiding the more controversial and contentious topics in their teaching or they only scrape the surface of these topics. In addition, many teachers are not comfortable with being placed in a role as someone who is there to influence the students' moral conception of the issues in the province. For most teachers, the aim of teaching history is to pass on their love of the subject and to develop the students' historical skills and their ability to think critically about what they learn. By putting much focus on the history subjects' potential role in the reconciliation process, focus is taken away from what the subject is about, namely teaching history.

In addition to pressure from above, teachers of history in Northern Ireland are faced with both parents and students having certain expectations about the teaching from the starting point. Some students might start their formal history education having already been exposed to history in their local community and in their own families. These are considerations that the teacher must take when deciding how to present the topics, and especially those elements of history that might prove to be contentious. The curriculum as it now is constructed, along with textbooks, can be useful aids for teachers who are unsure of how to tackle such issues. The next chapter will explore the influence history education has on the students forming their own identities, as well as the potential impact community history has on the formal history education. It will be argued that even though students learn much history outside the classroom, they see the teacher and the school as their best sources of gaining accurate historical knowledge.

Chapter Three - The Situation in the Classroom

'I don't have the right to impose my values on anyone.'

(Áine Byrne)[1]

'Understanding something is not the same as agreeing with it.'

(Conrad Thomas)[2]

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is an expectation, particularly among politicians in Northern Ireland, that the history subject and in particular the history teacher could make a positive impact on the current community divisions in Northern Ireland. The content of the subject deals with potentially contentious topics and because of this it becomes relevant how those topics are dealt with. However, not all history teachers are comfortable or even willing to be placed in a role as someone who is to influence the students in a certain way. History teachers' main aim is to teach history and deliver the historical facts to their students, as well as creating class discussions about the topics based on historical evidence. This creates a conflict between those who wish for history to be an active part in changing current community divisions and the history teachers, who for the most part just want to do their job and teach history without anyone attempting to influence them. If history becomes a subject that puts its main focus on developing the students' thinking in a certain way, it would lose much of its academic aspect. However, it is inescapable that the subject does have some potential in making a difference to how the students view themselves and their own situation compared to other subjects.

This chapter will attempt to discuss the actual situation the students encounter in the history classroom. First, the chapter will look at how students form their own historical identities and how this is influenced by the formal history education. It will be discussed whether this formation is more influence by forces outside or inside the school or if these factors are mutually influenced by each other. Then the chapter will move on to examine how the conflicting narratives of the province' history and the background for these differences affect the teaching of history. Lastly, the chapter will discuss where students actually learn history. This section will attempt to answer questions such as; does their community background influence their perception of the province' history? Or are the students able to separate between the history they learn in their communities and the formal history that they are taught in schools? These questions are highly relevant if one hope for the history subject

[1] Interview with Áine Byrne (Belfast, 7 March, 2012)
[2] Interview with Conrad Thomas (Belfast, 7 March, 2012)

to make a contribution to change the current community divisions, as well as being a central part of answering the main questions put forth in this thesis.

History Teaching and the Creation of Identities

History, and particularly national history, is genreally percieved to play an important part in shaping idenities, both at the individual and community level. In a place like Northern Ireland, where there are several conflicting historical narratives, the past can be used to justify and maintain conflict by selecting parts of it to support one's own view.[3] Reasearch done by Keith Barton and Alan McCully found indications that secondary students in Northern Ireland do not exclusively identify themselves with one or the other of the politicized narritves of history, and that their community backgrounds do not necessarily give an indication of their indentification. However, the research also found that the students historical identification narrowed considerably during the three years of Key Stage 3 when community division became increasingly important.[4] During the first three years of secondary education, many students also experience a pressure to identify with sectarian viewpoints. Consequently, there are indications that during their first three years of secondary school, the students' identification with Catholic/Nationalist or Protestant/Unionist increase dramatically. This could denote that it is during Key Stage 3, the time when history is a compulsory subject in school and national history is taught, that the students start developing their own identities,[5] which might be closely connected to that of their respective communities and the politciased versions that these communites present. Indvidual identity is thus closely linked to community and the fact that it is during these years that community identity becomes more important, indicates that history education during these years are important. However, it is difficult to desipher whether community identity is strengthen by the history education or if the formal teaching of history actually counteracts some of these trends. Most likely forces outside the school are most influential in this ares. The research done by Barton and McCully was also done in the US, and the results differed significantly in how strong the students connection between history and their own identity was. Students in Northern Ireland showed much weaker connection than the students in the US did and were less likely then their counterparts to use terms like *we, us,* and *our* when discussing the past.[6] Barton and

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[3] Barton & McCully, *History, identity, and the school curriculum in Northern Ireland*, 85
[4] Barton & McCully, *History, identity, and the school curriculum in Northern Ireland,* 95
[5] Barton, Conway & McCully, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland*, 10
[6] Keith C. Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past': Social contexts of children's historical understanding in Northern Ireland and the USA,* Comparative Education, 37:1 (2001), 100

McCully's research concluded that students in Northern Ireland do not see history as a way of forming individual or collective identity and very few of them suggested that lessons could be learned from the past.[7] The fact that they did not feel that lessons could be learned from the past, is likely to be connected to the students' lack of identification with people of the distant past. If the students do not see the people who lived at the time in question as having a direct link to themselves, it becomes potenitially difficult for them to see how their experiences could be connected to their situation.

Margaret Conway's results present a more encouraging picture of the potential history education holds in changing current community division. She found that secondary students' connection between history and their own identity are not influenced or controlled by Unionist or Nationalist themes, and they view schools and their history education as the most important influence in their understanding of the national history.[8] In this regard it is important to keep in mind, as noted by Barton and McCully, that 'history teaching in Northern Ireland is not meant to provide a direct alternative for the formation of student's identity.'[9] The history education is primarily meant to teach the students content knowledge and historical skills and abilities. It must also be considered that the school does not operate isolated from the rest of society. There are unmistakeble forces outside the schools that encourage sectarian identification and in some cases the schools and the teaching help to modify this influence on the students, while in other cases the history lessons are viewed by the students in a selective manner, despite the intentions and efforts of teachers and curriculum designers.[10]

The connection between history and identity is further complicated by the fact that in Northern Ireland the relationship between history and identity is complex because it involves highly charged political issues.[11] In Northern Ireland personal and public history do not necessarily reinforce each other and there might be a conflict between what the history that the students are presented with at school and history as it is portrayed in the media, in the museums and what they are presented with in their homes.[12] History is found everywhere in a society, and as a school subject it is one that most people feel an ownership of, even after they have finished school. All the teachers interviewed for this thesis pointed out that history was

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[7] Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 96
[8] Barton, Conway & McCully, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland*, 9
[9] Barton & McCully, 'History Teaching and the Perpetuation of Memories,' 113
[10] Barton, Conway & McCully, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland,* 10
[11] Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 99
[12] Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 100

one of the subjects most discussed at home partly because 'history is something that affects everybody and everybody has some degree of interpretation on it,'[13] and partly because there is no need for an academic bakcground to be able to take an interest in the subject.

At home, Protestants are more likely to emphasise the political origin and status of Northern Ireland, while Catholics more often focuse on fairness and equal rights.[14] Protestants students might come across stories of nationhood in their own communities, but these will not often be reinforced in school. Still, the students may draw selectively from the curriculum to support their developing identification with the state. Catholic students, on the other hand, are less likely to have the historical perspectives of the Catholic community reinforced in schools. This is especially because the time period and topics with which they are most likely to identify with is not covered by the secondary curriculum, which focuses more on recent history.[15] However, the formation of identity plays no formal role in the curriculum and it is therefore unlikely that this is given much contious attention by teachers. Still, history teaching is primarily meant to teach historical events and processes, it is not meant to function as a direct alternative to the formation of students' identity.[16] The students' formation of identity largely happens outside the school, and the school can only hope to counteract this influence. For instance, events like parades and the like contribute to the creation of group identity and in effect contribute to the continuation of conflict.[17] However, the schools and teachers could play a significant role in influencing the students' sense of identity, but they need to account for the fact that they are not the only influence.

It becomes a challenge for secondary educators to keep up the students' own interest in the subject as well as engaging them in a consideration of why history could have a relevance for contemporary society. Also, in many ways the current curriculum does not make the most of its oportunities to take advantage of the possiblities that the history subject holds. From this standpoint, history education could potentially lead to changes in community relations, but as long as the curriculum continues to focus solely on the academic aspect of history education, it is unlikely to do so. In addition, all teachers interviewed for this thesis expressed a wish to focus on making their students into capable historians who are able to gain a good academic grasp of history, rather then attempting to influnce their students' view on the conflict in the province. In contrast to this wish, the teachers interviewed at St.

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[13] Interview with Áine Byrne (Belfast, 7 March, 2012)
[14] Keith C. Barton, *"Best Not to Forget Them,"* 10
[15] Barton, *"Best Not to Forget Them,"* 32-33
[16] Smith, *Reckogning with the Past*, 113
[17] Barton & McCully, *History, identity, and the school curriculum in Northern Ireland,* 86

Dominic's indicated that in recent years teachers have been experiencing a pressure to put moral emphasis on certain topics conserning the Northern Ireland conflict in the subject. However, this pressure comes from civic groups, rather then from education groups.[18] This pressure comes in conflict with what the teachers aim to do with their history teaching, namely to teach historical events. Teachers see their role as that of being neutral and not to enforce their own view and opinions on their students. As related by Byrne, 'it is not our job to interpret it, it is to deliever it [history].'[19] Still, according to McCully, history educators in Northern Ireland has come some way in reckognising that the subject has a potential in responding to the conflict. However, research show that most educators spend more time teaching topics that are more distant in time and thereby struggle to challenge the potential impact community identity has on the student's thinking.[20]

In a divided society like that of Northern Ireland, history and particularly history education creates special challenges, because it is so closely connected with individual identity and collective belonging.[21] History very often play an important part in shaping identity and this should not be overlooked. Still, there are other forces at work which affects the outcome, for instance history education does not happen isolated from the rest of the society. The connection between history and the formation of identity was also recognised in the policy document *A Shared Future*, which states that 'people in Northern Ireland are no different to people anywhere else. They are not born Protestant or Catholic, Unionist or Nationalist, but build their personal identities out of the pallet of social and political opportunities that are before them.'[22] The schools and particularly the history subject do have the potential to be influencial in this regard. The task of attempting to change or influence the current situation can appear overwhelming but, as Barton states;

> 'in a country where disparate groups struggle to find common ground, and where public disocurse and paticipatory citizenship appear to be in a state of crisis, educators should be encouraged by the fact that history can help students think through critical issues of identity and social relations.' [23]

Compared to other school subjects, history is a subject that holds much potential in being influenctial in the process of providing students with a better understanding of themselves and the society they live in as Barton sees it.

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[18] Interview Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas (Belfast, 7 March, 2012)
[19] Interview Áine Byrne and Conrad Thomas (Belfast, 7 March, 2012)
[20] Alan McCully, 'What Role for History Teaching,' 176
[21] Alan McCully, 'What Role for History Teaching,' 172
[22] OFMdFM, *A Shared Future*, 7
[23] Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 101

Conflicting Views on the Region's History

According to John Whyte, there are four different, and sometimes conflicting, interpretations of the Northern Ireland conflict.[24] The two first of these interpretations are the Marxist interpretation and the Internal-conflict interpretation, whereas the remaining two interpretations are the ones that are most relevant for this research. These interpretations are connected to each of the different communities, one being the Nationalist community, the other being the Unionist community. The Traditional Nationalist interpretation mostly find its support in the Nationalist community, which is predominately Catholic, and it views the people of Ireland as one nation and puts the blame for the conflict on Britain.[25] They also argue that if Northern Ireland was reunited with the Republic of Ireland, there would no longer be a conflict. It is this argument that is used to support the standpoint that the British are to blame for creating and maintaining the conflict. Contrasting to this interpretation is the Traditional Unionist interpretation, which finds most of its support in the Unionist community, which is predominately Protestant. This interpretation argues that there are two distinct people in Northern Ireland, namely the unionist and the nationalist, and the fact that the nationalists refuses to accept the unionist have the same right to self-determination as they claim for themselves is the centre of the conflict.[26]

The Unionist community strongly identify themselves as British and take pride in the strength of the British Empire, and their historical narrative have two central military events from recent British history were Ulster Protestants played a major role, one of these being the Siege of Londonderry and the Battle of the Somme. Unionists view the Troubles as emerging from the Republic and the nationalist's intent to reunite Ireland. However, even though the unionists have always identified strongly as British, they feel victimised by the fact that Great Britain has not consistently supported them in the conflict.[27] From a unionist point of view, 'they were sent as the spearhead of Protestantism in an alien land where they were attacked by

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[24] Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, 175-205, The Marxist interpretation see Ireland, and particularly Northern Ireland, as having been colonised by the British and that the main conflict is between employer and employee. According to this theory, the employers fuels sectarian divisions to maintain there own position in society. The continuation of sectarian division is then the fault of the employer. This theory did not gain much support, mostly because sectarian differences proved to be stronger then the sense of belonging to a labour class. Another interpretation of the conflict, is the interpretation that focuses on the internal conflict. This theory puts less focus on outside forces and more on the internal. The British and Irish are seen as a part in the conflict, but even without their part in it, there would still be a conflict in the region.

[25] Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland,* 117

[26] Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland,* 146

[27] Smith, *Reckogning with the past*, 60-61

the locals, … and subsequently they were abandoned by those who sent them.'[28] The contrasting version of the history of Northern Ireland is the nationalist narrative. The nationalists also takes a victim position, however, this is somewhat different from the unionists one. They identify with the native Irish and see the British presence as an act of oppression. In comparison with the unionist narrative, the nationalists also have two key historic events in which they put much emphasis. The Great Famine and the Easter Rising are events that are used by the nationalists to build a case and place the blame of the conflict on Great Britain.[29] These differing views on history help to maintain community divisions. In addition, as noted by Neil Jarman, 'a shared history is used and re-worked both to enhance the identity of each community and to mark it as emphatically different from the other; they mirror each other and gain internal strength from their mutual opposition.'[30] When the children are exposed to a certain version of history from an early age, the role of history becomes important to influence and correct potential misconceptions. These competing versions of history in Northern Ireland have different arguments and viewpoints that strike at the heart of the ongoing conflict. Many of the history books written about the Northern Ireland conflict can be seen as directly or indirectly supporting a Nationalist or Unionist political standpoint. Consequently, some topics might be viewed as too controversial for the classroom by some teachers.[31]

Because of these different interpretations of the conflict itself, history becomes open to interpretation and can be used to support differing views. People in Northern Ireland are exposed to several different understandings of history, and particularly two are relevant to this discussion, those connected to the Unionist and the Nationalist communities, as outlined above. When children start their formal history education in Year 8, many of them have already been exposed to one or more of these versions, but these versions of history do not necessarily coincide with the history that is taught in schools. Members of both the Unionist and the Nationalist community have their own distinct perspectives on the province' history and are ready to present the events in which they find importance.[32] The students then are often exposed to a different history in their own communities then they are at school. This was evident in the responses from the teachers interviewed at St. Dominic's and at Campbell.

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[28] Smith, *Reckogning with the past*, 61
[29] Smith, *Reckogning with the past*, 60-61
[30] Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland,* (New York: Berg, 1997), 155
[31] Keith C. Barton & Linda S. Levstik, *Teaching history for the common good*, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 2004), 142.
[32] Barton, *"Best Not to Forget Them,"* 15

All related that the students had some form of historical knowledge acquired outside of the school at that this sometimes needed to be corrected. For instance, Byrne noted that some of her students would ask 'are Protestants taught the same history as we're taught?' when contentious topics were delivered, with her students often believing that they were given a certain slant on it because they belonged to the Catholic community.[33]

This is further supported by research done by Keith Barton, were he found that Protestant students were more likely to support the events leading to the current political structures of Northern Ireland. The Catholic students, on the other hand, were less focused on a particular moment of origin, because they considered themselves as descendants of the original inhabitants of the island. Also, many of them supported changes to the political dominance of Protestants and the constitutional connection to the UK.[34] In addition, Barton found that Protestant students were more likely to support and commemorate events that established Protestant control in Ireland. This was in contrast to Catholic students, who found that these events leading to Protestant settlement and control were historical injustices that needed correction.[35] Students' backgrounds are unavoidable elements in the classroom and teachers need to be aware of their students' social circumstances in addition to their expectations of what they are going to learn. For instance, there could be students sitting in the classroom who have somehow been affected by the Troubles and therefore the teacher would need to take this into account when deciding how to presents topics relating to this. Also, teacher do not always have extensive knowledge of every students family history, which means they always have to keep in mind that some student might have a personal connection to the content taught in class.

Several topics in the history education present potential challenges. This is especially true when it comes to teaching the history of the province. Addressing the topic of national development in history would mean making choices in how to best convey the conflicting narratives which, if not dealt with properly, could lead to serious political consequences. Arguments have been made by educators in Northern Ireland that institutions such as schools and museums should ensure that the competing narratives are presented in a neutral and rational manner so the public can make up its own mind. However, most primary schools and other institutions where children might encounter history tend to avoid potentially contentious

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[33] Interview with Áine Byrne (Belfast 7 March 2012)
[34] Barton, *"Best Not to Forget Them,"* 25
[35] Barton, *"Best Not to Forget Them,"* 32

issues and instead focus on the distant past and other less contentious topics.[36] During the years of formal history education, however, the more controversial issues are dealt with. This coincides, as mentioned above, with the students' formation of their own identities. It becomes important to teach the children that history and historical events are not always agreed upon, and what is more important, why there are different interpretations of the past. Teachers in Northern Ireland, and particularly in the Belfast area, are very conscious of the fact that the area in which they teach have been directly affected by the conflict. This was most eminent at St. Dominic's, where Byrne related that 'the things you say, … you're phrases and things you would use can very often be picked up and brought back and you need to be very careful about the way you phrase things so that you're not leaving yourself open.' It cannot and should not be overlooked that the students come from a situation that needs to be taken into consideration when teaching history. The students will always have some encounters with historical narratives before they start their formal history education.

Where do the Students Really Learn History?

Even though history is not formally taught before the students reach Key Stage 3, there are various areas where they potentially encounter history before this point. For instance, history in primary school is taught as a part of the *World Around Us,* subject. At this level, the students do not study history as a connected narrative related to the development of the society in which they live, in fact, according to Barton, 'they do not learn history as a 'story' at all.'[37] The narrative aspect of history is less focused upon. Instead of studying their own history, they study topics which are more distant in time and place. As a result of this, the students do not learn the details of the topics they are studying and they are meant to learn *the way of life* of for example the Vikings. Social connections then become the focus point, rather than presenting events chronologically.[38] An important part in the students' history education is their perception of why they learn history. Already at primary school, the students form the idea that they learn history to understand how other people lived and why they are different. The fact that history education already from an early age seems to put focus on developing the students' understanding and respect for cultural differences gives hope for the future. This is a focus point in the history curriculum, but also in the curriculum for the cross-curricular

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[36] Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 99-100
[37] Keith C. Barton, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland and the United States: Differing Priorities,* Theory Into Practice, 40:1 (2001), 53
[38] Barton, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland and the United States: Differing Priorities,* 49

subject *Education for Mutual Understanding and Diversity*.[39] This subject is structured around the understanding that if the students are to overcome the current community tensions in Northern Ireland, they need to grow up recognising that people who are different from themselves also deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.[40] Most primary students experience history as an important subject because it teaches about people who are different, and they 'conclude that the purpose of the subject is to examine those differences rather than to provide a direct link to their own identity.'[41] As discussed earlier, this connection changes and becomes more important during their secondary education. Already at primary level, the students learn to work with evidence as a part of understanding what happened in the past.[42] This is supported by learning activities that involve building replicas of Viking ships, exploring remains of ancients burial sites and visiting museum, which all contribute to emphasise the understanding of how people lived through evidence.[43] History education in Northern Ireland puts much focus on the use and interpretation of evidence. Apart from in their own homes and communities, evidence is an important source of historical knowledge about societies in different times and how they differ. However, few of the societies studied at primary level have any direct connection with modern Northern Ireland.[44] There could be many reasons why primary schools choose not to focus on topics which are closer both geographically and in time. One reason could be that the students find topics such as Vikings very interesting and by that making it an easy topic to teach. Another reason, which might be more plausible, is that the exclusion of recent Northern Irish history is deliberately left out. It could be desirable to postpone teaching this until the students gain a better grasp on working with evidence as part of understanding the past. If the students have a good understanding of why historical sources are important and how they can be used, it is likely that they are more equipped to learn about contentious issues in their later school years.

In Northern Ireland there is an assumption among adults that children know too much about history. Many adults have the perception that children learn sectarian stories at their mothers knee and that this knowledge last throughout their lives.[45] If one adopts this view on the students' historical pre-knowledge, then the outlook on history teaching becomes

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[39] Norman Richardson & Tony Gallagher, *Education for Diversity and Mutual Understanding: the Experience of Northern Ireland* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2011), 17-19
[40] Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 102
[41] Barton, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland and the United States*, 52
[42] Barton, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland and the United States,* 49
[43] Barton, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland and the United States,* 50
[44] Barton, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland and the United States,* 53
[45] Stewart and Byrne, refered to in Keith C. Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 101

pessimistic. History education would then render itself pointless, because the students have already been exposed to a different kind of history and formal education would not sway their perspectives. Secondary teachers often complain that they are unable to change early learning and that they cannot compete with what the students have already learned outside school. Nevertheless, research suggests that students in the primary grades do not have an understanding of the past that is dominated by politicised historical narratives and that they value the role of evidence in history.[46] This, however, is supported by the responses from teachers interviewed for this thesis, who all agreed that the students did not really know much history before they start secondary. However, as stated by McIvor, if the primary teacher has a background in history, this could be reflected in the pupils. In addition, the students who start secondary have studied some history, although they themselves have not realised that they have, because the content has not been presented to them as history.[47]

Students in Northern Ireland are exposed both to the common curriculum and to the conflicting and differing historical perspectives of their respective communities.[48] Because of these conflicting histories, there is no consensual narrative of the province' history that can be presented in schools and in other public arenas. This has implications for what the students experience as history. Students who have been exposed to community history, however, do not seem to reject the history they are taught at school nor do they replace prior knowledge with this. On the contrary, they choose selectively from the history curriculum to support their own views and developing historical identities.[49] The community conflict has undoubtedly a strong influence on history education in Northern Ireland. Despite this, the students do not necessarily have prejudiced and stereotypical view of history before they attend secondary school. This indicates that schools might be able to influence the students and help them develop viewpoints on history that are based on inquiry, evidence and multiple perspectives, which are the precise goals of the history curriculum.[50] This is in contrast to the teachers' responses that they cannot compete with the students' sectarian and politicised view on history. However, responses given by the teachers interviewed for this thesis did not find their students to be prejudiced.

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[46] Barton & McCully, *History, identity, and the school curriculum in Northern Ireland,* 88
[47] Both interviews
[48] Barton, *"Best Not to Forget Them,"* 15-16
[49] Barton & McCully, *History, identity, and the school curriculum in Northern Ireland,* 86
[50] Barton & McCully, *History, identity, and the school curriculum in Northern Ireland,* 110-111

Students in Northern Ireland recognise their families as an important source of historical knowledge.[51] However, there are often differences between the history that children hear from their families and the one that they are presented with in school, for instance, as noted by Áine Byrne, students 'would repeat different ideas and whatever that they have heard in the house … you know that the parents would not have wanted it repeated.'[52] In addition, many students might have older siblings who are studying history in school and tell their younger siblings parts of what they have learned. Some families might discuss historical topics which the children are studying around the dinner table. History as a school subject might be more susceptible to this than other subjects, simply because the parents do not need to have an academic background to understand and take an interest in what their children are learning about. All teachers interviewed for this thesis related that students sometimes would learn about a topic in school, talk about it with their families and then bring it up in a later class discussion, and as noted by Chris McIvor, parents opinions could sometimes be seen in class discussions, but it would be impossible to differentiate which opinions are the student's own and which are those of the parents.[53] Clearly, the students do acquire some historical knowledge from their homes, but despite this, they look to the school to give them an understanding of national history. The history classes are considered to hold more weight as a trustworthy and influential source of information about national history than any other source. Friends, however, are ranked as the least powerful influence on the students' perception of national history. Despite of this, according to Barton et al. 'it is from these peers that sectarian perspectives might be assumed to derive.'[54] In addition, television was seen as an important, informal source of historical information. However, there are indications that sources like television and books are being used to look into historical interests generated from within communities.[55] There are undoubtedly factors outside the school that influence how history is taught in Northern Ireland. This influence will continue to be there and all schools can do is to give the students the tools to interpret what they learn in a critical manner.

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[51] Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 93
[52] Interview with Áine Byrne (Belfast 7 March 2012)
[53] Interview with Chris McIvor (Bergen/Belfast 27 February 2012)
[54] Barton, Conway & McCully, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland*, 9
[55] Barton & McCully, *Learning History and Inheriting the Past*, 4

Also, as Letsvik and Barton noted:

> 'Neither children nor adults passively absorb information, whether at school or elsewhere … they engage in a process of active construction in which they interpret new information - encountered in a variety of formats and settings - in light of their ongoing attempts to make sense of the world.' [56]

The fact that students seem to perceive school as their best source for an accurate account of history is positive and, moreover, some students appear to use the knowledge learnt in school to support their own views. If teachers hope to influence this trend, they need to confront the students' developing ideas about history more directly and also provide a clearer alternative to the history they experience outside the classroom setting.[57] Still, the students are aware that school history is different and more objective and that this history provides them with a multi-perspective view of past events. The years of Key Stage 3 are also the time when the students make a linkage between history and their own identity. For this reason, educators should consider how to best capitalise on this opportunity to help students make rational choices.[58] In addition, students recognise that history in Northern Ireland is being abused and they are interested in studying history formally.[59]

Research done by Barton and McCully asked secondary students why they thought history was an important subject to study and they found that the students' responses could be sorted into three categories; social relevance, academic relevance, and personal relevance. Fifty-four percent of the students thought the subject had a social relevance, and that history could help students understand the origins of contemporary Northern Ireland. In addition, they saw the subject as useful in exposing them to multiple perspectives on Northern Ireland and to enlighten their experiences of the other community. Thirty-four of the students responded that the subject had an academic relevance, and that the purpose of studying history was to learn about historic events and they did not see a direct connection to current issues or societal concerns. Those students who answered that the subject had a personal relevance only made up twelve percent, and they responded that studying history could lead to jobs and that the subject was interesting.[60] The study concluded that the students' historical perspectives are significantly influenced by their families and communities and that this history is biased and politically motivated. These results show that a large portion of the students see that the

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[56] Letsvik and Barton, refered to in Barton & McCully, *History, identity, and the school curriculum in Northern Ireland,* 90
[57] Barton & McCully, *History, identity, and the school curriculum in Northern Ireland,* 111
[58] Barton, Conway & McCully, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland*, 10
[59] Barton & McCully, *Learning History and Inheriting the Past,* 8
[60] Barton & McCully, *Learning History and Inheriting the Past,* 6-7

subject have a social relevance. This should encourage teachers to make more strong connection between the history lessons and contemporary Northern Ireland.

A history teacher's job involves making choices. They have to choose what topics to teach, how to teach them, when to teach them, among others. These choices are not always up to the individual teacher. Often the school administration or the department will collectively decide which topics and historical periods to teach. In addition, history teaching is influenced by the school's need to get good results. This means that much of the history teaching also revolves around getting the students to learn as much content as possible prior to exams. Moreover, there is a challenge for secondary teachers is to capitalise on the students previous interest for the subject and at the same time engage them to consider why history might have a relevance for modern Northern Ireland. The students' initial interest in learning why and how people are different should be transferred to include the currents situation as well. However, if the history education remains to have a solely academic viewpoint, it is unlikely to be successful in achieving this goal.[61] In addition, many teachers are uncertain whether they can have an impact on the students' perception in recent history because such historical views are so deeply entrenched in the society.[62]

Teachers from both schools related that excursions were something that they liked to use to make the history teaching more varied. At Campbell College the students go on an excursion to Berlin, where they focus on World War Two. In addition, the teacher attempts to make a link between the situation in Berlin to that of Belfast, with both being divided cities. During this trip, the students also work with German students, which is meant to give them a different perspective on the history that they are studying and perhaps make the students view their own situation in a different light. The students from Campbell also visited Glasgow University and attended lectures and explored the libraries there. When they returned, they would present their finding to the rest of the class. Excursions were also used at St. Dominic's, were the students would go to Krakow and visit Auschwitz to learn about World War Two and the Holocaust. They would also go on an Easter 1916-tour to Dublin to learn about Irish history. However, even though both schools see the advantages of using excursions in history teaching, too much usage would take away resources from other subjects and management might not actively encourage excursions, especially those that involve travel. An alternative then could be excursions to historical sites and museums in the local

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[61] Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 102-103
[62] Barton, Conway & McCully, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland*, 2

area. However, in most public arenas in which the children encounter history, history is portrayed in a bland and neutral manner. This can for instance be seen in museums.[63] Despite this bland and neutral portrayal of the province' history, students often consider visiting museums and historical sites as potential sources of historical knowledge and experience the visits as interesting and informative.[64] One reason why the museums and other historical sites choose to present their information in a neutral manner, might be that they do not wish to engage in controversy. If their displays and the information they provide is in conflict with what the public want to see and hear, then this can be problematic since such institutions are dependent on visitors to stay open. In addition, many people would not want these institutions to deal with contentious topics in a controversial manner and that this is not their main aim.[65] The fact that these institutions focuses on neutrality, make them potentially more useful for educational purposes because they can be used by the teacher as an aid to make the lessons more varied without the teacher having to account for unhidden biased portrayal of the content.

National history is generally not taught until the third year of Key Stage 3. The topic is left to this year for strategic purposes, the idea being that the previous years of history education has taught the students a good base of knowledge and skills. This knowledge and the ability to use historical skills critically, is meant to contribute to give the students a greater understanding of the cultural and political background of their province. The three years of compulsory history education in secondary is hoped to also give the students an alternative to the sectarian histories that they encounter elsewhere in the society. After the compulsory study of national history during Key Stage 3, it is hoped students will have an alternative to the sectarian historical identifications that they are exposed to outside school.[66] Along with this overall goal that the education in itself should teach the students to have an open mind when dealing with contentious issues, it is also relevant that history education in the UK as a whole puts much focus on the use of sources and evidence. History lessons emphasise teaching the students to analyse and interpret the evidence they are presented with. In addition, 'according to a leading history educator in the United Kingdom, both teachers and historians have to some extent come to regard narratives as 'an unacademic, slightly immature and unreliable

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[63] Barton, *'You'd Be Wanting to Know about the Past,'* 102
[64] Barton & McCully, *Learning History and Inheriting the Past,* 3
[65] Barton, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland and the United States,* 50
[66] Barton & McCully, *Learning History and Inheriting the Past,* 1

mode of analysis' involving too much didacticism and too little students involvement.'[67] History education is then more about looking at source material and interpreting it, then about listening to the teacher tell them what happened. This focus on evidence in the history teaching results in the students in Northern Ireland having a more developed understanding of the role of evidence and historical processes then for instance students in the US.[68] The fact that schools and teachers focus on using evidence and different sources critically, is likely to help the students better develop an understanding of how other people's view on history might differ from their own. This gives hope for the history subject to be an instigator in changing current community divisions in Northern Ireland.

Summary

The history subject has, since the emergence of the Troubles, been seen as a key element in attempting to improve the community relations in Northern Ireland. The formation of historical identities becomes important in this regard and it cannot be overlooked that it is precisely during the years of formal history education that the students start to form these identities more consciously. If history education can make a positive contribution and prevent sectarian viewpoints and prejudice to flourish, and instead help the student to develop an understanding of people who are different from themselves, this would be benefitial. This becomes important in a province like Northern Ireland, where there are several conflicting views on the recent past. These differing interpretations on the province' history and the conflict itself presents several challenges for the history teachers. However, research discussed in this chapter have found that these contrasting narratives does not necessarily dominate the students' perception of history and many look to the school to teach them a neutral and correct version of history. Because the students' view their history classes as the most reliable source of historical information, it is possible to conclude that the teachers largely achieves their aim of teaching historical content and presenting it in a neutral and unbiased manner.

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[67] Husbands, refered to in Barton, *History Education and National Identity in Northern Ireland and the United States,* 50

[68] Keith C. Barton, *Primary Children's Understanding of the Role of Historical Evidence: Comparisons Between the United States and Northern Ireland*, International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research, 1:2 (2001), 5

Chapter Four - Conclusion

This final chapter will outline the main findings presented in the two previous chapters, as well as briefly discussing what implications these findings have for the history subject. The main aims of this thesis was to look into how the Northern Ireland conflict is taught in Northern Irish schools, as well as investigate if there is a difference in how history is taught in schools which are predominately Catholic when compared to schools which are predominately Protestant. The history subject has long been under scrutiny by the educational authorities, and this section will consider how these influences could potentially have an impact the future of the history subject. Also, the history teacher's role in shaping the future of the subject will be discussed.

Main Findings

In chapter two, the political and administrative side of the educational sector was examined, and it was argued that politicians and educational administrators in Northern Ireland attempts to utilise the possibility that the history subject holds to potentially bridge the gap between the two communities. This was related to the changes that have occurred in the educational sector in the past four decades from the introduction of a national curriculum. Already during the Troubles, politicians in Northern Ireland looked to the schools to be a positive influence in the reconciliation process. This was further strengthened when the peace process began in the early 1990s, as this seemed to create new opportunities for education. Although the signing of the Good Friday Agreement gave the province some much needed stability, it did not fully settle the issues that had lead to conflict in the first place. The Agreement also emphasised the right for people to define their own identity and, as debated in chapter two, this might have led to the increased political polarisation in Northern Ireland. With too much focus on acknowledging differences, it was argued that this might not be beneficial for the further development of reconciliation and contact between the two communities. Also in the *A Shared Future* policy document, some focus is put on the right to define one's own identity as well as accepting differences. In addition, this document discusses the role of teachers as someone who holds a tremendous influential position to be able to possibly change the current situation. This policy document also makes statements about how teachers should approach contentious issues. The chapter also looked into the history curriculum and the recent revisions of it. Ever since the introduction of the national curriculum, the curriculum

designers have aimed to create a history curriculum that deals with the content of the subject in a neutral manner. In addition, several changes have been made to the curriculum, most recently with the revision that was completed in 2007. These changes made it more open for the schools and teachers to decide for themselves which topic they wanted to focus on in their classes. The recent revision also continued the previous curricula's emphasis on using evidence in the history teaching. The chapter discussed how this focus on evidence and historical processes help the students develop their historical thinking.

In chapter three, the situation in the classroom was discussed and the connection between history and the formation of identity was examined. It was argued that it was during the years of Key Stage 3 that the students made a more conscious connection between history and their own individual identity and that the students place school history as their most influential source of historical knowledge. Additionally, it was argued that students are not necessarily as influenced by outside forces as one might expect. Even though the students already from an early age encounter history, both at home and in their neighbourhoods, the students seem to be able to separate between this form history and the form of history that they learn in school. Furthermore, the fact that the students rate their history classes and their teachers as the most reliable source of historical knowledge is important. In relation to this it was argued that much of the history that students experience in the public sphere is portrayed in a neutral and unbiased manner and that institutions such as museums, do not wish to provoke their visitors by presenting a one-sided version of history. The chapter also discussed the history teachers' situation and what they aim to achieve with their teaching. It was argued that most teachers wish to develop their students' abilities in thinking critically about historical events as well as using historical source material actively as part of the education. Because of this focus on evidence in the teaching, it was argued that school history prepares the students to look critically at the history they are presented with in the public sphere. Also, by putting focus on using evidence and developing the students historical skills before the students tackle more contentious issues in Key Stage 3, it was argued that this made the students better prepared for the versions of history that they might encounter after their school years. Despite this, it appears to be a difference in how Catholic students and Protestant students experience their history education and they choose to focus on different parts of the content they have been taught. Consequently, the history education might in fact risk perpetuating the perceptions that the students are confronted with outside the school. The chapter also discussed the role of the family as a historical source and how this influences the

history education. History seems to be a popular theme for family discussions and there are indicators that these discussions supplement, and in some cases contradict, the information that the students have learned in school. However, the history learned at home is not always historically correct and teachers might have to modify the fact and opinions that the students bring into the classroom. Also, the chapter looked into the need for teachers to be careful in how they phrase what they teach in class, as well as keeping in mind that there could be students sitting in the classroom who have been directly affected by the Troubles. Even though the students are influenced by outside forces, such as their family, the fact that they rate their history education in school as the best source of historical information, could be seen as an indicator that the teachers and the schools are largely achieving their aim of creating good, qualitative historians who are able to look at historical evidence and critically evaluate it. After having outlined the main findings in the thesis, the next section of this chapter will briefly discuss what these implications these findings have for the history subject.

Some Implications for History Education

The main findings in this thesis conclude that there are certainly positive trends in the history education in Northern Ireland. History has been, along with other subjects, put through some serious curriculum revisions over the last years, which have been aimed at further improving the subject. With even more focus being placed on understanding how history is created and developing the students' abilities to think critically about the content that they are presented with, it is hoped that this will have a positive effect on how the students think about history. In addition, as this thesis conclude, the history teachers in Northern Ireland are committed to making their teaching of the Troubles and other potentially contentious issues as neutral and unbiased as possible. The teachers also seem eager to engage the students to debate and discuss such topics, which can be seen as positive for the future of the subject. Most teachers are also very conscious about how they phrase themselves when addressing these issues. This can be seen as an indicator that teachers are devoted to teach history in a manner that allows their students to form their own interpretations and opinions without too much influence from the teacher. With this approach to history teaching, it is likely that the teachers are able to pass on their love of the subject without necessarily passing on their own interpretations and values.

Furthermore, the possible connection between history and the formation of identity, both at individual and community level, needs to be considered. History as a school subject

could potentially be closely connected to how students view themselves and the teachers need to be aware of this if they hope to provide a positive contribution to the process of reconciliation. In this regard, it becomes important to teach history in a manner that promotes understanding and mutual respect for people from different backgrounds. This is likely to be an important part of the subject in the future. If the students, through their formal history education, gain a greater insight into the lives of people who come from a different background than themselves, it is more likely that show more tolerance towards others.

In the years following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, much greater stability have been established in Northern Ireland, which have had a positive influence on the schools as well. However, there have in recent years been indications of an increase in political polarisation, with the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin gaining votes. With this in mind, the history subject could potentially hold an even more important role for the immediate future, and perhaps help to sustain stability by educating the children to understand how history can be used and abused to further a political message. In addition, the history subject could prove to be beneficial in developing the students' understanding of people who are different from themselves as well as generate respect for other people's opinions. This can only be seen as important part of the way forward for the history subject.

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